



THE ILLFURTH POSSESSIONS

and LA GRANDE DAME

In every age, beginning with the occurrences in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, Mother Church has seen to it that her children are confronted with the sensible proof of the existence of the supernatural known as diabolical possession. An authentic exorcism story should be read periodically by every good Catholic to bolster his faith, for this is one of the reasons God permits such things. For our instruction He sets the scene, assigns the roles in the drama, and not only allows, but sometimes even forces the demons to reveal their

activity among us, that we may remember that our battle is not against flesh and blood, and may act accordingly.

In view of our Lady's declaration to the children of La Salette that the devil would be unchained in 1864, it would be foolhardy to overlook a possession of two small boys which began in the German-speaking part of France in the fall of that very year. Still virtually unknown among American Catholics, this case is nevertheless one of the most copiously documented among the Church's countless dossiers on such matters. The most recent account is one written in the 50's in German by Fr. Sutter, erstwhile pastor of Eichoffen, who drew upon the wealth of contemporary sources open to him, not only the official diocesan proceedings, but firsthand accounts by Fr. Brey, the children's pastor, plus memoirs from the pens of a Marist brother named Lachemann, of Mayor Spies of Selestat (also a member of the Reichstag), of Fr. Hausser, Chaplain of the orphanage at Schiltigheim where one boy was exorcised, and who died only in 1921, and of André Rappoltsweiler, the children's guardian during their last weeks of possession. Besides these, there were police reports, parish records and a series of articles which appeared in the Catholic Review of Alsace after 1870, not to mention peripheral accounts of converted unbelievers and renewed fervor among the faithful.

Fr. Sutter's book ran through several editions and was translated into many languages. The following extracts are translated with permission from Fr. Francois Gaquerre's French rendition, published in 1977 by Editions Résiac in Montsurs, France. As we shall see, these possessions exhibited certain unusual characteristics most instructive for the post-Vatican II times in which we live. For one thing, they reveal that demons have quite definite political adherences! But first,

The village of Illfurth, which numbered 1200 souls in the middle of the last century, is located in Alsace, two leagues south of Mulhouse. At that time a respectable though modest family called Burner lived there. The husband, Joseph, was a peddler or huckster by profession the wife, Marie-Anne Foltzer, kept herself busy caring for five small children. The eldest boy, Thibaut (Theobald), was born August 21, 1855; the second, Joseph, April 29, 1857. Well-behaved pupils of average intelligence and delicate constitutions, they attended the local school.

Towards the end of the year 1864, being then nine and seven years of age, both were struck by a mysterious illness which Dr. Levy of Altkirch and several colleagues called in for consultation declared themselves unable to diagnose. The remedies applied remained without effect. Thibaut in particular became as thin as a skeleton. On September 25, 1865 symptoms clearly abnormal appeared in both. Lying on their backs, they would start spinning around like regular tops at alarming speed. . . . Then they would vigorously attack beds and other furniture in the house, "threshing in the barn," as they termed it.

Finally they would have hysterics and convulsions and fall for several hours into such prostration that they might have been taken for dead. The patients were often seized by a wolfish hunger which nothing could allay. On other occasions, their bellies would swell. They felt as if an animal were jumping about in their stomachs. They would intertwine their legs, bent like birches, so that they could not be separated. Thibaut was personally pursued by a horrible mon-

ster with a duck's bill, clawed hands and filthy feathers. Seeing the specter hovering over his bed threatening to strangle him, the child would scream in terror, lunge at it and pull out its feathers, this twenty or thirty times in broad daylight in the presence of numerous witnesses. When burned, the feathers would leave no ash.

Sometimes when the children were seated on a chair, this would be picked up by an invisible hand and hurled into a corner, with its occupant sent flying in another direction. At other times, experiencing a painful itching or prickly sensation, they would remove from their clothing a mixture of feathers and seaweed sufficient to cover the floor. So many woes finally riveted the poor children to their beds, their bodies entirely swollen.

People tried to bring blessed objects near them, a little cross, a medal or rosary, but then they would fall into violent rages. They had stopped praying. The names of Jesus, Mary, the Holy Ghost, would make them stiffen with fright. The same fear seized their parents, who had to watch these sinister manifestations, powerless to help. It spread to the neighbors and to the daily increasing number of visitors who sometimes arrived from a distance. Indeed the strange rumor had circulated very quickly, and everyone wanted to see these children and judge for himself.

What could be the cause of their strange illness? There lived at Illfurth an old woman of evil repute, driven from her birthplace because of her depraved ways. Had the children perhaps accepted some fatal apple from her hand? It was whispered that this is what the spirits who haunted the children had several times declared. In any case, it wouldn't be long before the nature of these spirits would be known, as a tree is known by its fruits.

For hours on end the children would be calm and apathetic. All of a sudden, they would become excited, stiffen, cry out and gesticulate like frantic. Their voices, however, were not those of children, but a man's voice, powerful, raucous and hoarse. As the children kept their mouths closed, it was clear that the words and cries were those of invisible beings inhabiting them. For hours they might call in one breath for "Noodles, meatballs, water!" It was enough to drive anyone away, and the parents were at their wits' end. Finally it occurred to the father to say, "Shout, boys, but shout louder, for the love of God!" Then the cries would subside and by and by cease entirely. The village mayor Mr. Tresch silenced them at one stroke by shouting at the children, "In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, yell even louder!"

The least invocation of the Most Blessed Trinity caused the children extreme fear. One day Thibaut asked his sister for a glass of water. "Drink, Thibaut, good things always come in threes." The child turned away immediately and nothing could make him drink. . . . The thought of having lost heaven, and that forever, filled the devil with inexpressible pain, which he sometimes relayed by the children's mouths: "Oh, how beautiful heaven is! If I could contemplate it only for one moment!" Mr. Tresch asked him why this complaint. "I'm forced to it," said he, "by the Three who are stronger than I."

Unusually bizarre was the children's anguish in the presence of holy things, their violent repugnance towards the church, prayer and divine services, as well as the execrable oaths and filthy subjects they voiced in a constant stream - something which had never happened with them before. Besides that, they expressed themselves, spoke and answered in several languages - French, Latin, Spanish - which they understood even down to their dialects.

With that, small wonder everybody wanted to see the poor children, and that the civil and ecclesiastical authorities became concerned with their fate and ordered a detailed investigation of the case. Foremost among the persons interested was the highly respected pastor of the place, Fr. Charles Brey. This was a saintly priest greatly devoted to the Blessed Virgin, justly renowned for his overflowing activity not only in Illfurth, but perhaps even more so in Switzerland and Austria as the founder of the *Gesellenhaeusers*, or centers for young workers. This eminent, pious pastor took a special interest in the necessitous Burner family and its two unfortunate little ones.

He soon realized the phenomena were of diabolic origin and that what was involved was a case of possession. . . . The worthy pastor was powerfully supported by the revered and devoted mayor Mr. Tresch and the best families of Illfurth. It's true that skeptical people were not wanting, but their number was small, and the infernal spirits manifested the satisfaction they took in them. On the other hand, the devils bore animosity towards those who penetrated their identity, especially the pastor, the mayor and three persons who had come from a distance for the express purpose of observing the case and studying it at leisure. . .

Two infernal spirits at least inhabited each child. They remained silent as to their names as long as they could. . . . Thibaut was possessed by the demons Oribas and Ypes. The latter

called himself the Duke of Hell, at the head of 71 legions. One of the demons haunting the younger boy Joseph was called Solathiel; it was never possible to learn the name of the other. This Solathiel was more cruel and clever than the guests of the elder. On the other hand, Yves was afflicted with deafness, for as long as he controlled the child, the latter was totally deprived of hearing, to the point that he showed no reaction whatever when a pistol was fired near his ear. Only at the moment of his deliverance did Thibaut recover his hearing. . .

The infernal spirits also had their superiors, before whom they quaked with fear. Now and then they received a visit from them, which they found far from agreeable. One day one of the children cried out in delirium, "Oh, oh, the boss is coming!" - "What boss?" he was asked. "Eh, our master!" - "Is he stronger than you?" - "Yes." - "What does he look like?" - "He has two feet, a body covered with feathers, a long neck, a duck's bill, and hands like long cat's claws." At that moment the child cried, "Here he is! Here he is!" With the master there then arrived other infernal spirits, satellites of his. Whereupon the possessed boy declared, "We are many." The master appeared sometimes in the guise of a savage, sometimes a dog, sometimes a snake.

■ The diabolical character of the possession manifested itself especially when the children were approached with holy water or blessed medals and rosaries. Then they would begin to belch, foam at the mouth, and would strenuously resist being touched in any way. If a few drops of holy water were secretly mixed into their food, they would explode. "Take it away," they would cry, "it's poison." If anyone tried to force feed them they would struggle violently, clenching their teeth. On the other hand, if there was no trace of holy water in their food, they would swallow it gluttonously. Force also had to be used to make the children put their food into their mouths with three fingers of the right hand, for one day the devil had declared "What the little cur (this is what he called the children) eats with his left hand, or with two fingers of his right, that's for me and not for him."

It was especially the blessed medal of St. Benedict that Satan feared. Moreover the parishioners of Illfurth always insisted on wearing it. Once when Mr. Tresch had an open prayer-book before him, one of the children shouted with a horrible blasphemy, "It's not necessary for you to come here to talk to us about that Crucified Clown and the Great Lady!" He always spoke of the divine Savior and His blessed Mother in these terms. . . . One day when Mr. Tresch took his leave of the children by sprinkling holy water on their bed with the words, *Sit nomen Domini benedictum* (Blessed be the name of the Lord), the devil retorted, *Non sit, non sit!* . .

■ Towards priests Satan always showed violent hatred, showering mockery and names on them. Fr. Stumpf (*Superior of the diocesan seminary*) was the object of his special aversion: "I'll find some way to torment him, the disgusting little man." And he added snickering, "Oh, I play a neat trick on him. If only he had croaked from it." It happened that this same Superior was raised into the air with incredible force as by an invisible hand, while pictures fell from the walls of his room and the furniture danced upside down. The dreadful manifestations ended only when the religious sprinkled the spirits with holy water and commanded them in God's name to leave him in peace. "That miserable Stumpf!" groaned Satan, "has barred the entrance of his room against me by flooding it with filthiness."

The devil's sympathies, on the other hand, lay with Jews, Protestants and especially with Freemasons. "There, at least," he would repeat, "are decent people, and partisans of true liberty! Oh, if only everyone were like them! They save our masters a great deal of trouble and bring them many followers, whereas the blackskirts do them only harm by snatching souls from them."

A brass crucifix put on Joseph's neck immediately disjoined itself into an X shape until it was removed. A scapular which had been placed on him flew off, described a vast arc in the air and fell onto the cap of police Officer Kerner, a witness to the scene. Satan told Mr. Tresch, "When you go to the pigpen (*the devil's word for the parish church*) to snivel, you all go up there," and he pointed to heaven. "But those who don't go there come to our place."

A lady visitor from Bettendorf one day stretched a blessed rosary across the chest of one of the demoniacs while someone held his hands: "If I get hold of those goat-turds, I'll tear that cattail to pieces. As for the likeness of the Great Lady hanging on it, I haven't the right to touch it." - "What is depicted on the medal?" - "A boy and a girl, whom the Great Lady is protecting." Actually it was a medal of Our Lady of La Salette representing the apparition to the two children.

Although the devil showered insult and derision on everything holy and on God himself, he

never dared find fault with the Mother of God. If he were asked the reason for this, he would reply, "I don't have the right to; the Fool of the Cross forbade me to. And he always referred to her as *la Grande Dame*, the Great Lady.

One day when Thibaut was calm, he was given a picture of the Mother of God, with which he began to play. All at once an attack came on. He threw the picture to the floor so violently he broke it to pieces. While efforts were being made to quiet him, Professor Lachemann of the Brothers of Mary of St. Hippolytus, who was there at the time, asked him in Latin, *Quid sentis de Immaculata Conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis, quae contrivit caput tuum?* "What do you think of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which crushed your head?" - "Beat it! Get out of here with your Great Lady," he retorted, "I don't want to hear anything about her. Whereupon he poured forth oaths so horrible that the nursing sister, terrified, seized the holy water and traced the sign of the Cross on his forehead, mouth and breast in the name of the Blessed Trinity, thereby completely quieting the patient. . . .

Several times one of the demoniacs would speak to Mr. Tresch about the statue of the Great Lady which he kept at home in a wardrobe. "Still, you've never yet seen it," observed the mayor. "Nevertheless, I know it," said the child. "You give everything to the Great Lady, you always keep her in your pocket." - "Why do you call her Son such ugly names?" - "I can't do otherwise."

. . . While holding little Joseph on his knees, Mr. Spies placed on the back of his neck a small square of silk which he could neither see nor feel. "Take that rag off me," he shouted immediately, "it's burning me!" - "Alright, on condition that you tell me what's on it." - "The Great Lady is on it!" he roared. True enough, a portrait of the Madonna was stamped on it.

And on another occasion, Thibaut told Marie Spies, the mayor of Selestat's zealous, saintly sister, "Because you keep the Great Lady at home, the bombs spare your house!" An allusion to the singular protection the Spies' house had enjoyed during the siege of Selestat in 1814, and from which it would again benefit in 1870.

Space forbids enumerating all the instances in the course of the possessions where the Great Lady's power prevailed, not to mention the efficacy of the humble sacramentals now regarded as "superstitious" even by many of the faithful. The demons' anger, inevitably excited by the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, was aroused even by some paper cut-outs of a procession of the Blessed Sacrament which a kind lady had given the children to color and set up. At the application of a relic of St. Gerard Majella the devil cried out, "Scram, you wap!" At the prayer, "From the snares of the devil, deliver us, O Lord," the demoniac screamed, "Shut up! You lie. No, No!"

Numerous physical complaints in the neighborhood which appeared due to natural causes in fact proved to have been the devil's doing, for they responded only to spiritual treatment. Mr. Tresch's ailing pig was cured by a medal of St. Benedict, and Benjamin Kleiber's horses recovered only after the stables were blessed with holy water. The same was true of Thibaut's infestation of lice and a mouse-bite suffered by a neighbor girl. And there were many embarrassing revelations of the secret sins of some people by the devil, who also boasted of how he frequented pubs and parties to incite souls to drunkenness and lust. We are told, too, The Evil One was partial to pictures of dogs and snakes. He would draw the most fantastic specimens of them. We have some in hell," he would say, "they are our leaders."

Many conversions ensued as a result of all this, but sometimes, sad to say, as in the case of the schoolmaster Mr. Miclo, the reverse occurred: He was the village "sage" and ring-leader of the unbelievers. In class he would make fun of the happenings at the Burners'. "Nonsense!" he proclaimed. "The devil doesn't exist."

The husband of the woman with the evil reputation who was believed to have given the children the fatal apple, was a fisherman by trade. One day he came to the rectory to make a present of a fine fish. Fr. Brey was absent, and his housekeeper was under strict orders from him never to buy nor accept anything whatsoever from that family for any reason. So she sent the man away. "Alright then," he muttered as he left, "if the pastor won't have any, I'll take it to the schoolmaster!"

No sooner said than done. The schoolmaster was happy to eat what the pastor had passed up. At that very moment the devil declared by the mouth of Thibaut, "There now! Miclo is one of ours! But we'll take delivery only a year from now!"

Not long after, the schoolmaster had taken his two children to visit relatives in the Colmar district. On the drill field he saw a company of soldiers at maneuvers, whereupon he betook

himself towards them crying, "I am Napoleon, Emperor of the French!" And taking a piece of paper, he went up to meet the officer and decorate him. The poor man had lost his mind. He was taken to the hospital, and then to the asylum at Stephansfeld. After a few months he was thought to be cured. He was released and returned to his job at Illfurth. But a week later he was found in the attic of the town hall strangled with a hemp rope. He had hanged himself. . . It had been exactly one year ago that Satan had declared, "We'll take delivery a year from now."

The devil made no mystery of his political persuasions. He bore a grudge against Napoleon III, who was on good terms with our Holy Father the Pope at the time, and he declared himself an ardent republican in a day now happily past when this term was synonymous with anti-clerical. "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, the French Republic!" With these words he was wont to greet visitors. "Idiot," Mr. Spies told him, "you don't know what you're saying!" - "Oh yes," he replied, "I know what I'm saying. Long live Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! When that happens, we'll make some good deals!"

Questioned on the whereabouts of the shirt of Jean Bochelen, Alsace's last martyr to the French Revolution, the devil cried out, "Silence on that score! An honest fellow (honest according to him) stole it during the fire. Otherwise they would have made relics of it afterwards." . . . During the summer of 1868 the children enjoyed a lengthy respite. When the attacks recurred, the mayor asked Satan, "Where did you go this summer?" - "I ran a lot of errands." - "Did you go to Spain (where revolution had raged)?" - "Yes, we had a lot of work over there; many were killed." - "Did you contribute to the expulsion of the Queen?" - "Yes." - "Why?" - "There's practically a priest to every house over there." - "Are there still many left?" - "Yes, more than here." Whereupon he told Mr. Tresch, "If I could drive you away from here, and the pastor, I could stay. . ."

When there was a visit from a priest or a good Catholic, the demoniacs would slip dexterously under the table or the bed, or they would jump out the window. If it was a matter of Catholics of coarser grain, self-styled liberals, then they would give vent to their glee: "That, now, that's one of ours. That's the way everyone should be!" . . . But as for Protestants and Freemasons, oh joy! "There," he would say delightedly, are good people we need more of, friends of freedom who bring us lords many subjects (for he called himself and his masters lords) without causing us too much work, whereas the swine and the blackskirts do us harm, give us work and snatch souls from us."

Mr. Spies once asked Joseph, "And Voltaire, how did you receive him on his arrival at your place?" - "Oh, great! We went to meet him in procession, and we grabbed him. When he reached the gate of hell he was frightened and drew back, but he couldn't get away from us, and he was forced to go through the hole into the fire!"



And all this while the Chancery took no action. During the month of May, 1868, the children reached the height of frenzy. Their language was vulgar and indecent, to such a point that Mr. Tresch and Mr. Brobeck (a neighbor) decided to take Thibaut at least, on a pilgrimage to Notre Dame des Ermites at Einsiedeln so he could be exorcised in a holy place. Except for the aforementioned gentlemen, no one at Illfurth could have suspected the plan. . . . Only the devil could have known it. He rendered the children surly and distracted and was unable to conceal his anger. . . . The child was calm during the trip; he admired the beautiful scenery, the lakes and mountains, and he consented to eat and drink like everyone else. . . .

When they left the guesthouse at the appointed time to go to the monastery, Thibaut began resisting with all his might. Brother Lachemann got a good grip on him and literally carried him to the room where Fr. Laurent Hecht was awaiting them. The religious began asking the child all sorts of questions. No answer. He began the prayers of exorcism; the demoniac replied in yowls. Admitting his powerlessness, the Father gave the group a second appointment for one o'clock that afternoon. *This proved equally fruitless.*

Another Father, Nepomucene Buchmann, began the same ritual again the following day with no greater success. This time the child's agitation reached its climax, whereupon the Father took the group into the great hall, which was hung with portraits of illustrious rulers. The child contemplated these still living persons with interest. "Soldiers!" he said. He particularly fancied the King of Prussia. Before Pope Pius IX he hung his head, and when they made him raise it, he closed his eyes. "That's enough," he told the Father.

On Wednesday and Thursday he was taken to the Chapel before the venerable image of the Madonna. While those present were reciting five Paters and five Aves, the child began to tremble

in every limb. He redoubled his efforts to get out, hanging his head during the prayers. On leaving they had all the trouble in the world to restrain his haste. What fear, what aversion the image of the Queen of Heaven inspires in Satan! Following another vain attempt to deliver the child, the Fathers advised the gentlemen to have recourse to the authority of the Ordinary, who would appoint a qualified priest to administer the rite of exorcism. This is the advice the Capuchin Fathers of Dornach near Basle had already given them. Fr. Laurent gave Fr. Brey a letter of recommendation in which he guaranteed the authenticity of the poor child's diabolical possession. . . .

Several years passed before the episcopal authority would make a pronouncement on the two children's case. Msgr. Raess, Bishop of Strasburg, remained skeptical and would concede the reality of the possession only after the report of a commission appointed by him. It was at the insistence of Canon Lemaire, Dean of Altkirch, that he ordered a canonical inquest on April 9, 1869.

Seen arriving in Illfurth for this purpose on April 13 were the three commissioners appointed: Canon Stumpf, Superior of the Major Seminary at Strasburg, Fr. Apollinaire Freyburger, Dean of Einsiedeln, and Fr. Nicholas Sester, a priest from Mulhouse. Fr. Brey being away, the mayor took them to the Burners' house, taking the precaution of admitting them by a back door so as not to attract the children's attention. They found only Mrs. Burner with Thibaut, who was sitting at a table at work unrolling a spool of thread. The younger boy had slipped out.

. . . They had no trouble locating the fugitive: He had hidden under a bed in the adjoining room. He had to be pulled out from under it by force. He struggled desperately for ten minutes and then hid his face. The mayor kept him under close watch to prevent his running away. Meanwhile Thibaut continued with his work. He made a good impression on the visitors: His quietness, his modesty, his open look and ingenuousness - all these, imbued with depression and weariness, conquered them.

Joseph, on the contrary, gave the impression of a real good-for-nothing: unruly, with a sneaky look, always looking to play some ugly prank, underhanded, lazy. Neither words nor blows could get the better of his surly attitude. The Superior, Fr. Stumpf, first gave him a blessed medal. Annoyed, the latter backed against the wall, and with a blow of his fist knocked the medal to the floor and began stamping with his feet. When the mayor, picking up the medal, wanted to make him kiss it, there was a regular free for all, with violent blows exchanged and the child making hideous faces and shuddering as if stung by a tarantula.

Thibaut had remained indifferent to this scene, barely throwing a furtive glance in his brother's direction, but when Fr. Stumpf gave him his turn at kissing the medal, he suddenly threw his spools down and turned away in fury, his face purple. He was left alone. Then he picked up his spools, put them away in a box and sat down quietly behind the table. Fr. Freyburger and Fr. Sester sat down beside him. This bothered him, and he moved away to the wall. Then seeing they didn't insist, he regained his composure and picked up some pieces of paper. His countenance exuded anguish and dread of further provocation. It wasn't long in coming. Mr. Tresch moistened his hands with holy water, and this drove Thibaut into headlong flight. Seeing all escape cut off, he fell to the floor and crawled under the table. Mr. Tresch pulled him out and seated him on a bench next to Superior Stumpf, facing the two other commissioners. With that the child moved to the end of the bench, his eyes lowered, calm to all appearances.

This bench was against the foot of the bed, from which it was separated by a blue cotton curtain. Father discreetly sprinkled the curtain with holy water. The child immediately began to groan as if in the grip of some cruel, mysterious pain. From his side, Fr. Stumpf offered him a picture taken from his Breviary. He rejected it violently. (Father) put it on his head while Mr. Tresch held him securely. Wasted effort. The demoniac kept shaking his head until the picture fell to the floor.

These states had exhausted him. With both arms he wiped away the perspiration which bedewed his face; he could hardly get his breath. In the meantime the younger brother had jumped out the window and was playing with some friends.

. . . In the evening when these gentlemen had left, the mayor returned to the Burners' and spoke to Thibaut: "Do you know the gentlemen who came to see you today?" - "What, you call them gentlemen? I'm more of a gentleman than they are." - "Where are they from?" - "One is from nearby, from Mulhouse." - "Which one?" - "The one who was always going out. He doesn't believe in it much, but the others are completely convinced." - "From where is the one who offered you the picture?" - "From Strasburg. That's the one who does me the most harm. It's the man with the big cloak who sent him." - "And the third?" - "That one is from Einsiedeln. But I'm

going to change their minds and destroy their convictions! We must point out that the child was totally deaf, and the parents had no idea from what city or for what purpose the visitors had come.

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At long last, after further investigation and mature deliberation, the Commission submitted its report to the Bishop, together with its recommendations on appropriate measures to be taken. Thibaut was entrusted to the care of five nuns at St. Charles Orphanage in Schiltigheim and finally successfully exorcised there in October 1869, after five years of pitiful suffering, for which he was in no way to blame. It must be acknowledged with St. Bede that "not only the wicked, but the innocent are sometimes permitted by God to be afflicted in body, and are even taken captive in spirit by the devil." Joseph was similarly delivered not long after in the cemetery Chapel outside Illfurth.

Why had such steps not been taken immediately to relieve these innocent children? Apart from the reasons known only to God's mysterious Providence, which made use of the delay to dispense a wealth of grace and instruction among the faithful, there was a secondary reason, supplied by the devil himself. We read,

This solution would have been reached long ago if various circumstances had not put it off. Satan had boasted of it beforehand: One day Mr. Tresch, in the presence of Mr. Spies and Mr. Martinot (head of the tax office at Selestatt), . . . had asked the elder child during an attack, "Where did you go today?" - "Oh," he answered, "I wasn't wasting my time. I went to Strasbourg." - "What for?" - "I fooled five curates." - "How did you do that?" - "I put on a cassock, and I succeeded in making them see things my way."

These gentlemen in fact learned later that one of the ecclesiastical superiors had ordered the canonical inquest, but that the priest appointed for this job had taken no action. It is true he had gone to Illfurth, but he wanted to see neither the children, nor their parents the Burners, nor even their house. That means the matter fell through, and the devil's case was thereby strengthened. *Diabolic impersonation is therefore no figment of fevered "medieval" imaginations. It is as much a fact of life today as it was when our Lord warned us that the wolves would don sheep's clothing to deceive the best of us.*

When they finally took place, both exorcisms were memorable, and highly instructive. First it must be noted that the previous attempts at exorcism, although entirely legitimate, had been carried on outside the jurisdiction of the children's Bishop and without an order from him. They came to nothing. Even when the authorization of the Ordinary was secured, however, the devil for a time had still refused to depart. At Schiltigheim he declared categorically, "My hour has not yet come. I won't go." Then the Father took a candle blessed by the Holy Father and said: "Proud Satan, I place this candle over your head to show you the way to hell. This is the light of the Catholic Church, and you are the spirit of darkness. Yes, return to hell and join the companions with whom you belong." - "I'm staying right here," answered Satan, "because it's good here, whereas in hell it's not good." *Nothing happened.*

Finally the Father took up a statue of the Mother of God. "Do you see the Blessed Virgin Mary? Once again she will crush your head. She will trace and stamp on your breast the names of Jesus and Mary to burn you eternally. . . . So, you won't give up? I have ordered you in the name of Jesus, in the name of the Catholic Church, in the name of our Holy Father the Pope, in the name of the Blessed Sacrament. You remain deaf to the voice of the priest. Well then, Satan, now it's the holy Mother of God who commands you. She commands you to leave here. Impure spirit, flee from the face of the Immaculate Conception! She is telling you to leave!"

At this point all began reciting the Memorare. Then the devil cried out, "Alright, I'm going!" Once more he squirmed like a crushed worm. A muffled cracking sound was heard in the body. The child stretched, leaned over and fell senseless. The devil was gone.

The same thing happened with Joseph later at Illfurth. The exorcists were on the point of giving up when, on the altar steps the priest had prayed for a moment in silence and promised a novena. Stepping down, he turned to the child: "I adjure you, in the name of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, to leave this child!" Satan replied furiously, "Why does this fellow have to come now with his Great Lady? Here I am forced to leave!" At these words those present felt an indescribable shock and knew the hour of deliverance had come. *Be it noted, however, that the Mother of God had also been specially invoked at Einsiedeln, but she had refused to act until the children's Bishop ordered the exorcism. It is to her that God is pleased to reserve vic-*

tory over Satan in our latter times, as predicted in Genesis, but only acting in conjunction with the hierarchical authority set up by her divine Son. Let him who reads understand.

To be understood properly, her intervention at Illfurth, occurring when it did; should be viewed as one of a whole complex of such Marian events peculiar to our age. Varying in scope and importance, these began with the definitive triumph of democracy in France, where she appeared to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830. Sixteen years later at La Salette she gave us the whole panoramic forecast of the unprecedented crisis into which the Church was then falling, and which would be resolved only by the final destruction of the Antichrist. Her apparitions since then, at Lourdes, Pontmain, Fatima, Beauraing and elsewhere - not to mention others still awaiting the Church's approval - seem to be merely more detailed explicitations of the one "Grande Nouvelle" entrusted at La Salette to Melanie Calvat. At the latter's death in 1904, L'Osservatore Romano commended her for her heroic fidelity to this mission, though knowing such action would draw the anger of those who, their morals gone, were hitched to the wagon of the Masonic sect. Melanie herself predicted the Secret of La Salette would be consigned to oblivion; and today nearly as few know of it as have heard of Illfurth.

Nonetheless, after a century and a half, the Marian interventions can be seen to constitute a whole distinct body of doctrine - certainly not new in itself, but with specific application to the modern dilemma. At Illfurth our Lady was pleased to remind us of our three major weapons against the devil: (1) Herself, Mother of God and our Mother. (2) Obedience, to jurisdictional ecclesiastical authority, regardless of any suffering this may entail. (Accepting the invalid ministrations of clergy without proper faculties for hearing Confessions and blessing Marriages is already a gigantic temptation to many panicking faithful seeking help at any price) (3) Sacramentals, the deadly effective small arms Mother Church puts in the hands of her least foot soldier. Holy water, canonized prayers, scapulars, crucifixes, medals, candles, rosaries, sacred images, blessings of all kinds constitute a whole arsenal proportioned to the faith of the user. Especially important is the blessing at meals, actually a homely exorcism designed to neutralize any maleficium ingested. We may believe the Illfurth possessions in fact result from such unblessed ingestion by the hapless children.

At La Salette our Lady predicted that hordes of infernal spirits would soon be allowed to roam the earth as never before. Would God leave us defenseless?



If some day, dear reader, you visit the village of Illfurth, you will see a beautiful monument in a garden near the square, not far from where the Burner children's house once stood: the gilded statue of Mary Immaculate on an imposing stone pedestal. . . On the pedestal appear these words:

*In Memoriam perpetuam liberationis duorum possessorum Theobaldi et Josephi Burner
obtentae per intercessionem Beatae Mariae Immaculatae. Anno Domini 1869*

EPILOGUE

The reader may perhaps wonder what happened afterwards to the two unfortunate children. . . Both died quite young. Thibaut died two years after his deliverance, on April 2, 1871, at the age of sixteen. His brother Joseph found work in Zillisheim, and died in that area in 1882 at the age of twenty-five. Fr. Brey made it his duty to bring him the Last Sacraments. This zealous pastor, who was in charge of the parish of Illfurth for thirty years, died in the odor of sanctity in 1895 at the age of sixty-eight. . . According to testimony from his flock, like the Curé d'Ars he had had much to suffer from vexations of the infernal spirit, especially at night. He would rid himself of it by dint of holy water, and advised the same practice to visitors who risked spending a night under his roof. . . .

(Translated from the French with permission: EDITIONS RESIAC F 153150 Montsurs, France. S.S.H.)

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WRITE FOR COMPLETE LISTING

We can do no better than to introduce the Secret with the same words Melanie used before setting down her recital of the marvelous happening at La Salette:

"I obey the most holy Virgin Mother of God and Mother of all believers. I submit this publication to the judgment of the Holy Apostolic See, and I declare condemned in advance all found therein contrary to Catholic doctrine:"

THE SECRET OF LA SALETTE
(Authentic text of 1904)

Melanie, what I am going to tell you now will not always be secret; you can publish it in 1858.

Priests, my Son's ministers, priests, by their evil life, by their irreverences and their impiety in celebrating the holy mysteries, by love of money, love of honor and pleasures, priests have become sewers of impurity. Yes, priests call forth vengeance, and vengeance is suspended over their heads. Woe to priests, and to persons consecrated to God, who by their infidelities and their evil life are crucifying my Son anew! The sins of persons consecrated to God cry to heaven and call for vengeance, and now here is vengeance at their very doors, for no longer is anyone found to beg mercy and pardon for the people; there are no more generous souls, there is now no one worthy of offering the spotless Victim to the Eternal on the world's behalf.

God will strike in an unparalleled manner.

Woe to the inhabitants of the earth! God will exhaust His anger, and no one will be able to escape so many evils all at once.

The heads, the leaders of the people of God, have neglected prayer and penance, and the devil has darkened their minds; they have become those wandering stars which the ancient devil will drag with his tail to destruction. God will permit the ancient serpent to sow divisions among rulers, in all societies and in all families; both physical and moral punishments will be suffered. God will abandon men to themselves and will send chastisements one after the other for over 35 years.

Society is on the eve of most terrible scourges and greatest events; one must expect to be governed by a rod of iron and to drink the chalice of God's wrath.

Let not my Son's Vicar, the Sovereign Pontiff Pius IX leave Rome after the year 1859; but let him be steadfast and generous, let him do battle with the weapons of faith and love; I shall be with him.

Let him beware of Napoleon; his heart is double, and when he will want to be both Pope and emperor at the same time, God will soon withdraw from him: he is that eagle who, desiring always to rise, will fall on the sword he wanted to use to force the peoples to exalt him.

Italy will be punished for its ambition in wanting to shake off the yoke of the Lord of lords; thus she will be handed over to war; blood will flow on all sides; Churches will be closed or desecrated; priests, religious will be driven out; they will be put to death, and to a cruel death. Many will abandon the faith, and the number of priests and religious who will separate themselves from the true religion will be great; even Bishops will be found among these persons.

Let the Pope beware of miracle workers, for the time has come for the most astonishing wonders to take place on the earth and in the air.

In the year 1864 Lucifer, together with a great number of devils, will be loosed from hell: little by little they will abolish the faith, and that even in persons consecrated to God; they will so blind them, that without a special grace, these persons will take on the

spirit of these evil angels; a number of religious houses will lose the faith entirely and cause many souls to be damned.

Bad books will abound over the earth, and the spirits of darkness will everywhere spread universal relaxation in everything concerning God's service; they will have very great power over nature; there will be churches to serve these spirits. People will be transported from one place to another by these evil spirits, and even priests, because they will not have lived by the good spirit of the Gospel, which is a spirit of humility, charity and zeal for the glory of God. The dead and the just will be made to rise. [That is to say, these dead will assume the aspect of righteous souls who once lived on earth, in order to seduce men more easily; these so-called resurrected dead, who will be nothing other than the devil under these faces, will preach another Gospel, contrary to that of the true Christ Jesus, denying the existence of heaven, if these be not in fact the souls of the damned. All these souls will appear joined to their bodies.] * There will be extraordinary wonders every place because the true faith has been extinguished and false light illumines the world. Woe to the Princes of the Church who will be occupied only with piling up riches upon riches, with guarding their authority and lording with pride!

My Son's Vicar will have much to suffer, because for a time the Church will be handed over to great persecutions: it will be the time of darkness; the Church will undergo a frightful crisis.

With God's holy faith forgotten, each individual will want to direct himself and rise above his peers. Civil and ecclesiastical authority will be abolished, all order and justice will be trampled underfoot. Only murders, hatred, jealousy, lying and discord will be seen, with no love of country or family.

The Holy Father will suffer greatly. I shall be with him till the end to receive his sacrifice.

The wicked will make a number of attempts on his life without being able to shorten his days (nuire à ses jours); but neither he nor his successor will see the triumph of God's Church.

Civil governments will all have the same objective, which will be to abolish and make every religious principle disappear, to make way for materialism, atheism, spiritism and vices of all kinds.

In the year 1865, the abomination will be seen in the holy places; in the convents the flowers of the Church will putrefy, and the devil will establish himself as king of all hearts. Let those who are at the head of religious communities be on their guard concerning the persons they are to receive, because the devil will use all his malice to introduce into religious orders persons given to sin, for disorders and love of carnal pleasures will be widespread over the whole earth.

France, Italy, Spain and England will be at war; blood will flow in the streets; Frenchman will fight with Frenchman, Italian with Italian; then there will be a general war which will be appalling. For some time God will no longer remember France or Italy, because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is no longer known. The wicked will unleash all their malice; even in homes there will be killing and mutual massacres.

With the first lightning blow of His sword, the mountains and all nature will tremble with dread, because the disorders and crimes of men are piercing the vault of the heavens. Paris will be burned and Marseille swallowed up; a number of large cities will be shattered and swallowed by earthquakes; all will seem lost; only murders will be seen, the clash of arms and blasphemies heard. The righteous will suffer greatly; their prayers, their penance and their tears will rise to heaven and all God's people will ask pardon and mercy and will

*Added by Melanie.

ask my help and intercession. Then Jesus Christ, by an act of His justice and His great mercy towards the righteous, will command His angels to put all His enemies to death. At one blow the persecutors of the Church of Jesus Christ and all men given to sin will perish, and the earth will become like a desert.

Then there will be peace, the reconciliation of God with men; Jesus Christ will be served, adored and glorified; charity will flourish everywhere. The new kings will be the right arm of Holy Church, which will be strong, humble, pious, poor, zealous and imitative of the virtues of Jesus Christ. The Gospel will be preached everywhere, and men will make great strides in the faith, because there will be unity among Jesus Christ's workers and men will live in the fear of God.

This peace among men will not last long: 25 years of abundant harvests will make them forget that the sins of men are the cause of all the woes which happen on earth.

A precursor of the Antichrist, with his troops drawn from many nations, will wage war against the true Christ, sole Savior of the world; he will shed much blood and will seek to annihilate the cult of God so as to be regarded as a god.

The earth will be struck with plagues of all kinds [besides pestilence and famine, which will be widespread];* there will be wars up to the last war, which will then be waged by the ten kings of the Antichrist, kings who will all have a common design and will be sole rulers of the world. Before this happens, there will be a sort of false peace in the world; people will think only of amusing themselves; the wicked will indulge in all kinds of sin; but the children of Holy Church, children of the true faith, my true imitators, will grow in the love of God and in the virtues dearest to me. Happily the humble souls led by the Holy Spirit! I shall battle along with them until they reach the fullness of maturity.

Nature begs vengeance on account of men, and she shudders with dread, awaiting what must happen to the crime-stained earth.

Tremble, earth, and you who profess to serve Jesus Christ, while interiorly you adore yourselves, tremble; for God will hand you over to His enemy, because the holy places are in a state of corruption; many convents are no longer houses of God, but pastures for Asmodeus and his own.

It will be at this time that the Antichrist will be born of a Hebrew nun, a false virgin who will be in communication with the ancient serpent, master of impurity; his father will be a Bishop (Ev.);** at birth he will vomit blasphemies, he will have teeth; in a word, this will be the devil incarnate; he will utter terrifying cries, he will work wonders, he will live only on impurities. He will have brothers who, although not incarnate devils like himself, will be children of evil; at the age of twelve, they will be noted for the valiant victories they will win; soon they will each be at the head of armies, assisted by legions from hell.

The seasons will be changed, the earth will produce only bad fruits, the heavenly bodies will lose the regularity of their movements, the moon will reflect only a feeble reddish light; water and fire will lend convulsive motions to the earth's sphere, causing mountains, cities, etc., to be swallowed up.

Rome will lose the faith and become the seat of the Antichrist.

*Added by Melanie.

**We spell out the word "Bishop" here. In the French text only the first two letters (Ev) of the French word for Bishop appear, but there can be no doubt that this is the word they stand for, because in Melanie's first draft of the message the whole word is spelled out.

The demons of the air, together with the Antichrist, will work great wonders on the earth and in the air, and men will become ever more perverted. God will take care of His faithful servants and men of good will; the Gospel will be preached everywhere, all peoples and all nations will have knowledge of the truth.

I address a pressing appeal to the earth: I call upon the true disciples of the God living and reigning in the heavens; I call upon the true imitators of Christ made man, the one true Savior of men; I call upon my children, my true devotees, those who have given themselves to me so that I may lead them to my divine Son, those whom I bear as it were in my arms, those who have lived in my spirit; finally, I call upon the Apostles of the Latter Times, the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ who have lived in contempt of the world and of themselves, in poverty and humility, in contempt and silence, in prayer and mortification, in chastity and in union with God, in suffering, and unknown to the world. It is time for them to emerge and come enlighten the earth. Go, show yourselves to be my dear children; I am with you and in you, provided your faith is the light enlightening you in these evil times. May your zeal make you famished for the glory and honor of Jesus Christ. Do battle, children of light, you, the few who see thereby; for the time of times, the end of ends, is at hand.

The Church will be eclipsed, the world will be in consternation. But there are Enoch and Elias, filled with the Spirit of God; they will preach with the power of God, and men of good will will believe in God, and many souls will be comforted; they will make great progress by virtue of the Holy Ghost and will condemn the diabolical errors of the Antichrist.

Woe to the inhabitants of the earth! There will be bloody wars, and famines; plagues and contagious diseases; there will be frightful showers of animals; thunders which will demolish cities; earthquakes which will engulf countries; voices will be heard in the air; men will beat their heads against the walls; they will call on death, yet death will constitute their torment; blood will flow on all sides. Who could overcome, if God doesn't shorten the time of trial? At the blood, tears and prayers of the righteous, God will relent; Enoch and Elias will be put to death; pagan Rome will disappear; the fire of Heaven will fall and consume three cities; the whole universe will be struck with terror, and many will allow themselves to be seduced because they didn't adore the true Christ living in their midst. It is time; the sun is darkening; faith alone will survive.

The time is at hand; the abyss is opening. Here is the king of the kings of darkness. Here is the beast with its subjects, calling itself the savior of the world. In pride he will rise skyward to go up to Heaven; he will be stifled by the breath of St. Michael the Archangel. He will fall, and the earth -- which for three days will have been in constant change -- will open its fiery bosom; he will be plunged forever with all his followers into hell's eternal chasms. Then water and fire will purify the earth and consume all the works of men's pride, and everything will be renewed; God will be served and glorified.

(English translation by S.S.H.)

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